NUMB. CCCCV.

The SPECTATOR.

Οἱ ᾧ πανημέριοι μολπῇ θεὸν ἱλάσκοντο,
Καλὸν ἀείδοντες παιήονα κοῦροι Ἀχαιῶν,
Μέλποντες Ἑκάεργον. ὁ ᾧ φρένα τέρπετ' ἀκούων. Hom.

Saturday, June 14. 1712.

Am very ſorry to find, by the Opera Bills for this Day, that we are likely to loſe the greateſt Performer in Dramatick Muſick that is now living, or that perhaps ever appeared upon the Stage. I need not acquaint my Reader, that I am ſpeaking of *Signior Nicolini*. The Town is highly obliged to that Excellent Artiſt, for having made us the *Italian* Muſick in its Perfection, as well as for that generous Approbation he lately gave to an Opera of our own Country, in which the Compoſer endeavoured to do Juſtice to the Beauties of the Words, by following that Noble Example which has been ſet him by the greateſt Maſters in that Art.

I could heartily wiſh there was the ſame Application and Endeavours to cultivate and improve our Church-Muſick, as have been lately beſtowed upon that of the Stage. Our Compoſers have one great Incitement to it: they are ſure to meet with excellent Words, and, at the ſame time, a delightful Variety of them. There is no Paſſion which is not finely expreſſed in thoſe parts of the Sacred Writing, which are proper for Divine Songs and Anthems.

There is a certain Coldneſs and Indifference in the Stiles of our *European* Languages, when they are compared with the Oriental Forms of Speech; it happens very luckily, that the *Hebrew* Idioms are received in the *Engliſh* Tongue with a particular Grace and Beauty. Our Language has received innumerable Elegancies and Improvements, from that Infuſion of *Hebraiſms*, which are derived to it out of the Poetical Paſſages in Holy Writ. They give a Force and Energy to our Expreſſions, warm and animate our Language, and convey our Thoughts in more ardent and intenſe Phraſes, than any that are to be met with in our own Tongue. There is a Sublime ſo pathetick in this kind of Diction, that it ſets the Mind in a Flame, and makes our Hearts burn within us. How cold and dead does a Reader appear, that is compoſed in the moſt Elegant and Polite Forms of Speech, which are natural to our Tongue, when it is not heightened by that Solemnity of Phraſe, which may be drawn from the Sacred Writings. It has been ſaid by ſome of the Ancients, that if the Gods were to talk with Men, they would certainly ſpeak in *Plato*'s Stile; but I think we may ſay, with Juſtice, that when Mortals converſe with their Creator, they cannot do it in ſo proper a Stile as in that of the Holy Scriptures.

If any one would judge of the Beauties of Poetry that are to be met with in the Divine Writings, and examine how kindly the *Hebrew* Manners of Speech mix and incorporate with the *Engliſh* Language; after having peruſed the Book of Pſalms, let him read a literal Tranſlation of *Horace* or *Pindar*. He will find in theſe two laſt ſuch an Abſurdity and Confuſion of Stile with ſuch a Comparative Poverty of Imagination, as will make him very ſenſible of what I have been here advancing.

Since we have therefore ſuch a Treaſury of Words, ſo beautiful in themſelves, and ſo proper for the Airs of Muſick, I cannot but wonder that Perſons of Diſtinction ſhould give ſo little Attention and Encouragement to that kind of Muſick, which would have its Foundations in Reaſon, and which would improve our Virtue in proportion as it raiſed our Delight. The Paſſions that are excited by ordinary Compoſitions, generally flow from ſuch ſilly and abſurd Occaſions, that a Man is aſhamed to reflect upon them ſeriouſly; but the Fear, the Love, the Sorrow, the Indignation that are awakened in the Mind by Hymns and Anthems, make the Heart better, and proceed from ſuch Cauſes as are altogether reaſonable and praiſe-worthy. Pleaſure and Duty go hand in hand, and the greater our Satisfaction is, the greater is our Religion.

Muſick among thoſe who were ſtiled the choſen People was a Religious Art. The Songs of *Sion*, which we have reaſon to believe were in high repute

pute among the Courts of the Eastern Monarchs, were nothing else but Psalms and Pieces of Poetry that adored or celebrated the Supreme Being. The greatest Conqueror in this Holy Nation, after the manner of the old *Grecian* Lyricks, did not only compose the Words of his Divine Odes, but generally set them to Musick himself: After which, his Works, tho' they were consecrated to the Tabernacle, became the National Entertainment, as well as the Devotion of his People.

The first Original of the Drama was a Religious Worship consisting only of a Chorus, which was nothing else but an Hymn to a Deity. As Luxury and Voluptuousness prevailed over Innocence and Religion, this form of Worship degenerated into Tragedies; in which however the Chorus so far remembered its first Office, as to brand every thing that was vicious, and recommend every thing that was laudable, to intercede with Heaven for the Innocent, and to implore its Vengeance on the Criminal.

Homer and *Hesiod* intimate to us how this Art should be applied, when they represent the Muses as surrounding *Jupiter*, and warbling their Hymns about his Throne. I might shew, from innumerable Passages in Ancient Writers, not only that Vocal and Instrumental Musick were made use of in their Religious Worship, but that their most favourite Diversions were filled with Songs and Hymns to their respective Deities. Had we frequent Entertainments of this Nature among us, they wou'd not a little purifie and exalt our Passions, give our Thoughts a proper Turn, and cherish those Divine Impulses in the Soul, which every one feels that has not stifled them by sensual and immoderate Pleasures.

Musick, when thus applied, raises noble Hints in the Mind of the Hearer, and fills it with great Conceptions. It strengthens Devotion, and advances Praise into Rapture. It lengthens out every act of Worship, and produces more lasting and permanent Impressions in the Mind, than those which accompany any transient Form of Words that are uttered in the ordinary Method of Religious Worship.

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